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ABSTRACT

This study explored what first grade children say and know about the use of "word walls." Sixty-three first graders and their three teachers were interviewed about their perceptions and use of the word wall. Interview answers showed that the students in this study used the word wall for writing and spelling words and teacher directed activities. Additional results appear to show that the instructional emphasis of a teacher will influence how and when the children use the word wall. This finding implies that for analogy instruction with word walls to be effective, direct and systematic teacher instruction must occur. Appendixes contain the survey instrument, a letter to parents, and data. (Contains 31 references, 7 tables, and 15 figures.) (Author/RS)

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Perceptions, Knowledge and Use of Word Walls Among First Graders

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Western Washington University
1999-2000

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Abstract

This study explored what first grade children say and know about the use of word walls. Sixty-three first graders and their three teachers were interviewed about their perceptions and use of the word wall. Interview answers showed that the students in this study used the word wall for writing and spelling words and teacher directed activities. Additional, results appear to show that the instructional emphasis of a teacher will influence how and when the children use the word wall. This finding implies that for analogy instruction with word walls to be effective, direct and systematic teacher instruction must occur.

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Introduction

Effectively teaching young students high frequency words is essential. Children use high frequency words regularly as they read and write. There are different interpretations of high frequency words. Sitton (1997) established a list of the top 1,200 words used in writing. This list includes both words with regular and irregular spelling patterns. Sitton emphasized the importance of teaching these words in priority of frequency to ensure that words used more often are learned before the words used less frequently. Pinnell and Fountas (1998) also developed a list of five hundred high frequency words that is in alphabetical, rather than frequency order.

Cunningham (1995) emphasized that many high frequency words are difficult to learn because they have no concrete meaning and often share the same letters. Words like this, there, were, where and when are often confused by beginners. Cunningham (1997) states "when primary students learn to recognize and spell common words automatically, their attention is freed up for learning less common words . . . and for processing meaning" (p. 52).

Approaches for teaching the spelling and writing of high frequency words are varied and vast. Many controversies surround how to teach high frequency words in order to optimize student learning. One well researched method involves teaching students high frequency words through direct instruction. Peer tutoring programs for struggling students have been another effective method for teaching sight words (Barbetta, Miller, Peters, Heron & Cochran, 1991). Some educators advocate teaching common words through repeated story readings (Moustafa, 1997) and predictable books (Stahl, 1992). Cunningham (1995) presents a plan for teaching sight words that

supports teaching words through associative learning. This theory suggests that the learning of words should be more than just flashcards repeated over and over again. She suggests that teachers use visual, auditory and kinesthetic methods to help students access meaning to words. Cunningham also stresses the importance of practice by repeatedly writing common words in dictated sentences.

Establishing a structure for students to utilize when learning to spell and read high frequency words is critical. One literacy tool utilized when teaching common words in classrooms today, is the word wall. The history of the word wall dates back to 1978 when Cunningham conceptualized the idea as a way to actively involve students while learning high frequency words. Since then, the concept of the word wall has evolved and expanded greatly.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe first grade students' perceptions, knowledge about and use of a word wall as they learn to spell and read high-frequency words. Analysis of student perceptions about word walls and the search for patterns surrounding the use of a word wall by teachers is explored among three first grade classrooms.

Word walls can be defined in many ways. Gentry (1998) states that word walls are, "the foot soldiers of building spelling skills–your first line of defense in getting kids to look at words" (p. 29). Word walls can evolve and organize collections of words. Words are printed with large, bold ink on a large bulletin board. Each classroom involved in this study has a word wall that displays the twenty-six letters of the alphabet,

under which new high frequency words are added.

As previously stated, there are a wealth of high frequency word lists available for teachers. Each of the first grade teachers in this study utilizes a slightly different set of word wall words. In all three classrooms, many of the weekly high frequency words were chosen from the reading series, *Scholastic Literacy Place* (Education Group, 2000).

The Grand Tour Question and Subquestions

As a result of my interest in word walls, the following focus question emerged: What do first grade children say and know about the use of word walls in the classroom?

Additional subquestions addressed through this study are:

*How do students use a word wall as a visual or learning aid?

*How does a teacher's instructional focus surrounding word walls influence what students say about word walls?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout the body of this paper. Please refer to this section for clarification.

Analogy strategy: A strategy taught to children that uses "familiar rimes to both identify and spell unfamiliar words" (Brown, Sinatra & Wagstaff, 1996, p. 83).

Chunks: A term used in some classrooms in place of the technical term rime. Word part is another common name for rime. (For example, -ake in cake) (Wagstaff, 1999).

Draftbook: A writing book that is used for students' daily compositions.

High-frequency words: Words that are "used throughout a lifetime of everyday writing" (Sitton, 1997, p. 9). These words occur most often in reading and writing. High frequency words can be both irregular and phonetically decodable.

Key word: A word placed on the word wall that displays a commonly used rime. Children have visual access the key word and use it to spell other similar words. For example, play could be the known key word that helps children to spell the unknown words may and say (Gaskins, Ehri, Cress, O'Hara, & Donnelly, 1997).

Scaffolding: Involves the "gradual withdraw" (Harris & Hodges, 1995) of teacher support. As learners develop their strategic behaviors the support previously provided by the teacher can be gradually decreased.

Sight word: A word that is instantly recognized by the reader. When reading sight words "readers retrieve information about the words stored in memory from previous experience reading the words" (Gaskins et al., 1997). Extensive word solving strategies are not used by the reader in order to identify these words.

Rimes: The rime is the part of a word that consists of "a vowel and any following consonants of a syllable," for example, -ink in sink. (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 221).

Word wall: Word walls look different in each instructional setting. In this study, the author is referring to a collection of high frequency words. Words are printed with large, bold ink and placed on a large bulletin board.

Delimitations and Limitations

I addressed several limitations when considering my research. The data collection procedure posed one limitation. The data was collected through observational fieldnotes and interviews; consequently, this process was subjective in nature and may have been biased in the interpretation. Data gained through the interview process is

not necessarily gained in the natural classroom setting. The narrow number of participants and grade levels in this qualitative study decreases the generalizability of the findings, although similar classrooms might find the study results useful. Internal sampling occurred through the site selection process. First graders at other buildings did not participate in this project, therefore, this internal sampling process limits the generalizability. This study is not generalizable to all first grade classrooms as my school is unique from other educational settings. However, teachers can read this action research project and compare the findings to those in their own classrooms. Drawing their own evaluative conclusions promotes further teacher research.

This research is delimited by the length of the study. Confining the amount of time spent on the study narrows findings. Another delimitation of this study is that I am not intending to develop a product or an outcome. I wish to determine first graders knowledge of the word wall. The outcome will be descriptive in nature and will be used to further refine my teaching practices.

Literature Review

Descriptive papers and books with sections that discuss how to teach utilizing a word wall are available (Cunningham 1995; Moustafa 1997; Wagstaff 1999). However, specific result driven research in this area does not exist. Through extensive reading, teachers can determine *what* they have to know in order for word walls to be an effective learning tool for children. In spite of this, it is much more difficult to determine if using a word wall is a genuinely beneficial method for teaching word identification. It is essential for me to observe and assess my students' use of the word wall in spelling,

writing and reading in order to accurately determine the benefits of such a teaching method.

Benefits and Significant People as Related to Word Walls

Word walls promote independent word solving through students' learning the process of finding the words. Cunningham (1995), Moustafa (1997), Pinnell & Fountas (1998), and Wagstaff (1999) all promote the word wall as a tool that is repetitively used in order to learn to read and spell words. Irregular words that must be learned by sight can be included on word walls for references in spelling and writing. Wagstaff (1999) and Gaskins, Gaskins, & Gaskins, (1991) advocate using a word wall to display words with common chunks or rimes. These words are often referred to as key words (Gaskins et al., 1991). Using words on the wall as references for making new words is a strategy that was designed for struggling readers. However, Gaskins et al. reports that comparing and contrasting familiar words using the key word strategy "also works well for students with no reading difficulties" (p. 224).

Pinnell & Fountas (1998) believe that carefully sequenced learning activities around words on the word wall "provides a rich context for active, ongoing learning that meets the needs of many different children" (p. 42). Word walls were initially developed by Cunningham in 1978. The original concept was designed for quick writing and word recognition instruction that could fit into an already packed school day. The idea behind the word wall was that children would become more skilled at vocabulary and spelling which would result in improved writing (Cunningham, 1978). In Cunningham's original description, children's names and concrete images for words, such as cat and dog were added to the wall first. These words were followed by high frequency words

which were posted on the wall during reading instruction. The original picture of a word wall showed the words in alphabetical order. However, the words were not placed under alphabet cards or separated by beginning letters. Word walls have expanded and taken many forms in various educational settings. Table 1 identifies educators who are active in promoting the use of word walls as a way to effectively involve students in reading and writing instruction.

Table 1.

Key Proponents of Word Walls

Author	Title	Main Use	What It Might Look Like
P. Cunningham	Phonics They Use (1995)	Designed to teach high frequency words. Activities and instruction such as reviewing rhyming, making sentences and clap, chant and write are done on a daily basis.	Words are written on different colored paper and placed underneath an alphabet card. The wall is constantly expanding as the year progresses.
R. Gaskins, J. Gaskins &I. Gaskins	A Decoding Program For Poor Readers–and the Rest of the Class, Too! (1991)	Weekly word wall words consist of key words used in analogy instruction and one or two irregular, high frequency words. Spelling instruction, using the words in language experience stories and other structured activities occurs on a daily basis.	Words are arranged in alphabetical order on the word wall. The word wall is located above the chalkboard.
Hiebert, Pearson, Taylor, Richardson & Paris	Every Child a Reader: Topic 4, Fluency. (1998)	A few words are introduced weekly. Daily practice saying and writing the words is done. Children use the word wall for independent reading and spelling.	In a focal point of the room. Includes the "100 most frequent words in written English" (Hiebert et al. 1998).
M. Moustafa	Beyond Traditional Phonics (1997)	Used as a way to teach letter sound generalities in context. All words are pulled from texts that children are familiar with; either having had an adult read to them, with them or having read it by themselves.	Words on the wall are constantly being regrouped by the teacher and children. A logo representing the word is beside each word.
M. Moustafa & E. Maldonado-Colon	Whole-To-Parts Phonics Instruction: Building On What Children Know To Help Them Know More (1999)	Used to teach phonics in context. Words are taken from shared reading, poetry and other instructional situations.	Moustafa has expanded her idea from 1997 to include the concept that the word wall can be portable. For example the words could be taped to a vinyl shower curtain. As the word wall becomes crowded, words can be archived onto metal rings and placed at centers.
G.S. Pinnell & I.C. Fountas	Word Matters (1998)	Word walls are used to help teach about words and how they work. They promote independence and foster writing and reading. They are a support and a reference while writing. Pinnell and Fountas (1998) suggested placing twenty-six alphabetical library pockets along the bottom of the wall where a duplicate copy of the word can be placed for children who need to gain even closer access to the print. These students can walk up and take the word back to their seats to use as a visual reference while writing.	Similar to Cunningham with a second copy of the words in library pockets along the bottom for easy access. Other interactive charts would also be posted around the room.

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Author	Title	Main Use	What It Might Look Like
Janell Wagstaff	Teaching Reading and Writing With Word Walls (1999)	Word walls are collaboratively built with students. Phonics, spelling, and conventions are practiced in authentic contexts. The word wall is also a helpful reference during reading and writing.	A wide variety of word walls are all over the room. You might have an ABC wall, a common word wall, a chunk wall, or more.

Among the proponents of word walls there are many striking similarities. For example, Cunningham (1995), Gaskins (1991) and Wagstaff (1999) all promote the use of analogy instruction that utilizes the word wall. Moustafa (1997) and Cunningham (1995) emphasize choosing words from big books and poetry that are used in the classroom. Hiebert et al. (1998), Cunningham (1995), and Pinnell and Fountas (1998) all emphasize fast paced instruction on the high frequency words.

Recommended size, accessability, portability and visibility of word walls differs among the proponents of word walls. The word walls described by the proponents in Table 1 all have unique and differing features. Suggestions range from portable shower curtain word walls (Moustafa & Maldonado-Colon, 1999) to large permanent word walls. Interpretation and teacher understanding of a word wall's purpose and use also changes from classroom to classroom. Other notable differences among the key word wall proponents in Table 1 include the number of words introduced each week and the use or non-use of picture symbols accompanied by the word wall word.

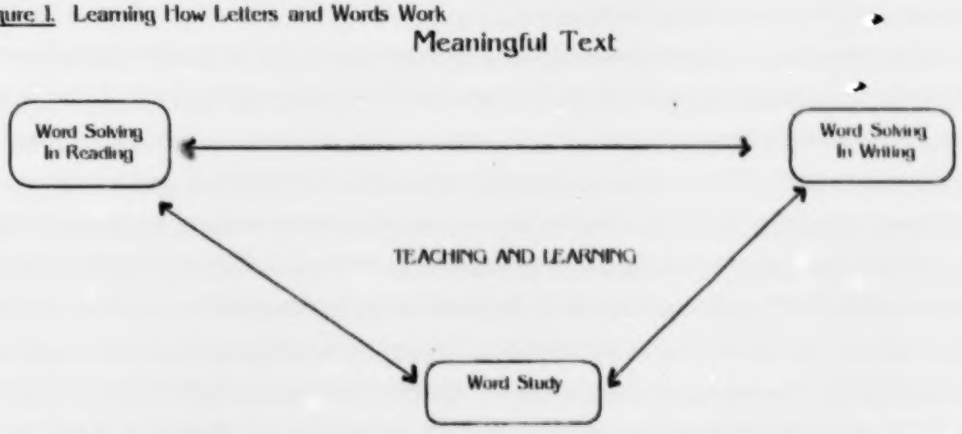
Word Walls In a Balanced Literacy Environment

Word walls are promoted by Cunningham (1995) and Wagstaff (1999) as a way to integrate meaningful phonics instruction into a balanced literacy program. Two characteristics of effective literacy teachers (Metsala, 1997) are that they provide an instructional balance and maintain extensive use of scaffolding. Immersing children in genuine literacy experiences, balanced with comprehensive explicit teaching and

modeling is critical for students to gain literacy skills. A stimulating literacy environment includes an environment rich with print that allows children to learn about written language (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998).

Effective word study takes place within the context of a classroom that keeps the following concepts in mind: a) language is in constant use, b) writing and reading occurs for a variety of purposes, c) children are encouraged to notice and explore word spellings, meanings, and relations, and d) word investigations are fun and interesting. Pinnell & Fountas (1998) reinforce the idea that "enjoyment, motivation, and interest are essential for effective word solving" (p. 87). Word wall activities can be one part of this word solving instruction. Figure 1 shows the framework that Pinnell and Fountas utilized as a tool when planning how to teach word solving within a balanced literacy curriculum.

Figure 1. Learning How Letters and Words Work



Pinnell & Fountas (1998).

Routman (1996) offered advice for how to "reclaim the basics" (p. 49) while providing meaningful literacy instruction in a balanced framework. Routman goes on to

say that "it is realistic...to expect children–even young children–to spell basic high-frequency words correctly" (p. 51). Spelling charts and word walls are one way to emphasize correct spelling for children.

Word Identification

The expectation of students, parents and administrators is that first grade teachers will teach their students how to read. Unlocking the mystery of words and teaching children how to successfully identify words in context is critical. Word identification is fundamental in order to learn how to read fluently. Ehri (1991) concludes that:

> In learning to read English, beginners' eyes are confronted with three types of structural units that they use to make contact with their knowledge of language: letters, words, and sentences. During the course of learning to read, the eyes come to favor written words as units (p. 383).

Stanovich (1991) states that "research continues to indicate that word recognition is the foundational process of reading" (p. 418). A strong argument can be made that readers who cannot identify words promptly and effortlessly will experience continual hardship understanding what they read because they spend their cognitive abilities on decoding in place of comprehension (Stanovich, 1986, Brown et al., 1996). It is possible to find a child lacking in reading comprehension abilities who has acceptable word recognition skills. However, it is virtually impossible to find a child whose skills reflect the opposite spectrum, good reading comprehension with inadequate word recognition abilities (Stanovich, 1991).

When students "possess strategies for coping with unfamiliar words...[they] can spend most of their time and cognitive resources where they should be spent–on constructing and composing meaning" (Brown et al., 1996, p.98). Beginners learn to read words four ways: by sight, phonetically decoding, contextual guessing, and analogy (Ehri, 1991, Gaskins et al., 1997). Sight word reading is the act of memorizing connections between word meanings and their visual forms (Ehri, 1991). Phonetically decoding consists of decoding words based on letter sound cues and blending them into words. Gaskins et al. (1997) defines contextual guessing as "using meaning-based cues in preceding text or in pictures to predict what a word might be" (p. 314). Analogy incorporates using known words to figure out unknown words. Skilled readers become able to read words by sight regardless of which way they were taught to read (Ehri, 1991).

Debate continues over techniques for teaching word identification skills to beginning readers. Methods such as flash cards, repeated readings, word association (Moran, Smith, Meads & Beck, 1996), using meaningful contexts (Sinatra, 1992), utilizing texts with controlled vocabulary and clapping, chanting and writing words (Cunningham, 1995) are all used in classrooms to teach children to fluidly read words. Designing meaningful contexts for instruction, while considering students' developmental levels in word identification and spelling is a complex process (Brown et al., 1996). Brown and others maintain that an additional tool to consider for teaching word identification skills is the word wall.

Word Walls: Analogies to Read and Spell

When articulate readers engage in reading, is each and every letter sounded out?

Probably not. Adults and fluent readers seem to "recognize new words by comparing them or spelling patterns within them to words they already know " (Stahl, 1992, p. 622). Cunningham (1978) states that "word identification is a process of searching through a store of known words and comparing the unknown to the known rather than a process of applying a series of adult-taught rules" (p. 778). Utilizing a word wall during analogy instruction can help students to strategically spell and read unknown words (Brown et al. 1996).

Moustafa (1997) postulates that using analogies to read is a more successful method than reading by means of letter sound correspondences. She emphasized that as children learn to recognize more words, their ability to make analogies between familiar and unfamiliar words will help them read unknown words with similar letter patterns. Goswami (1986) suggested that reading words by analogy is one of the first strategies or methods used by beginning readers. She found that children read words by analogy before they could read words by decoding. Ehri and Robbins (1992) challenged this finding with additional research. They analyzed the procedure used by Goswami (1986) and determined that her "claim that analogizing emerges before sequential decoding may pertain to the kinds of spellings that she tested rather than to the general reading skill of the subject" (p. 14). The Ehri and Robbins (1992) study pre-assessed children based on their ability to decode simple three letter words containing a vowel in the medial position. The children were grouped as either decoders or nondecoders. Half of the two groups were taught using analogy and the other, the control group, was taught by traditional phonetic methods. Ehri and Robbins (1992) stated that:

> Findings of the present study support Goswami's (1986) claim that reading unfamiliar words by analogy to known words is an easier process and can be executed by beginners more readily than reading unfamiliar words by phonologically recoding the words. However, findings also indicated paradoxically that in order for beginners to read words by analogy, they must possess phonological recoding skill (p. 22).

Ehri and Robbins (1992) also found that children gain information while learning words. This information is remembered and included into the spelling processes of even emerging readers. The connections between spelling and reading have been found to be directly linked (Adams, 1990). Brown et al. (1996) sought to explore these links through a case study of nine children that examined the results of classroom instruction surrounding analogies. The case study concluded that there is an increasing call for instruction that strengthens and supports emerging readers at their developmental levels and "evidence is accumulating that an approach we call "analogy instruction" may have the potential to meet this demand" (Brown et al., 1996, p. 83). Brown et al. clearly and concisely contrasted analogy instruction with word family instruction:

> Word family instruction typically is limited to helping students identify and memorize the individual words that make up a number of word families. Decoding by analogy, in contrast, represents a systematic approach to teaching students how to use rimes strategically (p. 83).

In the study conducted by Brown et al. (1996) reading and spelling utilizing analogies were taught in an authentic literacy context over time through poetry, word

wall instruction, teacher modeling and integration across the curriculum. The teacher continuously used and modeled analogy strategies and the children were encouraged to discuss and analyze words and their parts. Brown et al. (1996) found that "analogy instruction has a decidedly metacognitive emphasis" (p.86). Additional conclusions were that students increased in their use of familiar rimes when writing, slightly increased their use of unfamiliar rimes when spelling unknown words, and students made gains in their reading, both in comprehension and word recognition. Analogy instruction has the capability to concurrently support students' spelling and word identification development. It is significant to note that these findings were not attributed solely to analogy instruction, but rather, analogy instruction that was coordinated with a well planned, balanced literacy program.

Metacognition: Thinking and Talking About Words on the Wall

In a key study on metacognition Gaskins et al. (1991) based weekly analogy instruction around several key words. Each week more words were added and displayed on the word wall. Despite the emphasis placed on using analogies to access unknown words, students often struggled with recalling key words. Teaching children how to quickly and automatically access key words was essential. In a follow up study Gaskins et al. (1997) found that in order for analogy instruction to be successful, children must have the key words memorized and accessible in their sight word vocabulary. Using analysis techniques Gaskins et al. (1997) focused on teaching children the importance of being introspective and analytic in their word learning. Opportunities for students to become word detectives and thoughtfully discover how words are spelled became a critical component of instruction. Extensive occasions to talk about the irregular and key

words that were being learned were provided. This study suggests that skillful teachers pay "special attention to helping students develop metacognitive knowledge about their learning processes" (p. 326).

Students who are successful at using analogy strategies for determining unknown words actively engage in one aspect of metacognition. Underwood (1997) discussed past studies on metacognition and reading, in particular the connections between young readers and older readers in relation to the teaching of reading utilizing metacognitive strategies. He stated that "beginning readers need self-awareness and self-assessment capacities in order to learn to recognize words and gain fluency" (p. 77). Pearson (1993) emphasized that these thinking skills can be taught through teacher modeling and student practice.

Scaffolding With Word Walls

Constructivist theory "assumes that learners construct their own knowledge on the basis of interaction with their environment" (Gagnon & Collay, 1999, p. 1). Constructivist thinking supports the idea that learning is affected by the context, beliefs, and attitudes of the learner. Students' understanding is constructed by their prior knowledge, and they make their own meaning as they interact in the classroom. Word walls and interactive lessons with word wall words scaffold children's learning. Pinnell and Fountas (1998) believe in scaffolding knowledge with word walls through the investigation of "important principles rather than simply memorize[ing] individual letters or words" (p. 42). Children are given the opportunity to build on prior knowledge through meaningful conversations about words and how they work. During engaging and multi-leveled lessons students bring their own schema and add new information. Scaffolding during student-teacher

writing conferences can be a part of word wall instruction. During these situations assistance can be provided and reduced as the child's competency increases. Constantly adjusting the amount of adult intervention to the child's needs during word wall instruction is critical.

Learning how to read, write and spell words accurately are critical skills that need to be in our students' toolbelts. One skill students need to possess in order to achieve success in these areas is accurate and fluent word identification. Building on students' knowledge and providing an environment where students have opportunities to build on past successes is critical. One instructional method that can be utilized in a balanced literacy classroom is a word wall. Word walls, when implemented with specific and strategic instruction, can help scaffold students' prior knowledge while teaching skills such as word identification, spelling, analogies to words, and thinking metacognitively about words.

Significance of the Study

Word walls are used as a educational device in many classrooms. A study that explores how children utilize word walls in the classroom is important for several reasons:

- to understand and clarify student perceptions of word walls.
- to determine how children utilize a word wall as a visual or learning aid.
- to understand teacher purposes for teaching with a word wall.

My district has recently adopted *Scholastic's Literacy Place* (Education Group, 2000) as a new reading series. One deficiency that I observed in the first grade teacher's manual is the repeated direction to put the weekly high frequency words on a

word wall, and yet there was no additional information as to how or why first grade teachers should be using a word wall. This study is beneficial to all primary teachers in my district as it provides them with the background information on how and why students use word walls.

Methodology

Study Design

In this case study design I am concerned with gaining an understanding of how first grade students at my school use word walls. To gather this data sixty-three students of varying ability and ethic backgrounds, from three first grade classrooms, were interviewed. Word walls are one component of the balanced literacy program in each of the selected classrooms. It is almost impossible to isolate the word wall as a separate entity when describing student learning outcomes. As opposed to attempting to conclude that students have learned to spell accurately because of instruction surrounding the word wall, I focused on describing when, how and why students use word walls. As a teacher researcher, I am suggesting a theory on how first graders, in my building, utilize word walls in a natural setting.

I did not able to step back and exclusively observe individual subject's word wall use everyday. Therefore, the descriptive process of interviews best meets the needs of this qualitative study. Selected interview questions were self-designed. Test piloting for the interview occurred with three children on January 12, 2000. The test interviews went smoothly and no modifications were made to the original interview questions. (Appendix A)

The interview answers were analyzed and classified. Through the classifying and analyzing I looked at students' perceptions and processes and tried to gain understanding of their word wall usage. Interview questions and additional data information can be found in the data collection and analysis sections. A sample survey can be found in Appendix A.

The Role of the Researcher

This action research project occurred in the building where I currently teach first grade. While this research site was chosen due to convenience and availability of the students to the researcher, the student population provides an interesting mix of ability levels and cultures. The following steps were taken to secure permission for this study: 1) completion and submission of the *Western Washington University's Human Subjects Activity Review Form*, 2) building principal permission, 3) verbal permission from the two first grade teachers included in the study, 4) parent permission form (Appendix B) returned from all students who participated in this study.

In this qualitative case study I am the classroom teacher, the researcher, the interviewer, the observer, the transcriber, and the analyzer. During the course of the study I was an active participant in what went on each day. I was a participant/observer as my classroom is one of the three classrooms that is participating in the study.

Data Collection

Data on student perceptions of the word wall was collected through individual interviews. For this project there were two interviewers. A university professor and I conducted all of the interviews. I interviewed all of the students in Mrs. Red's and Mrs. May's classrooms and the professor interviewed my own students (Ms. Eli) to control for

bias.

Individual butcher paper word wall replicas were made for each classroom. These were used as a visual aid during the interview. All of the words on the replica were typed in size 60 font. The words were cut out and pasted on the word wall replica. Each classroom word wall replica contained the exact same words that appeared on the classroom word wall on the day of the interview. The size and writing of the replica word wall differed from the actual classroom word walls. The word walls in the classroom all had larger word cards. The words on the walls in the classrooms were all handwritten, as opposed to typed. Each of the three classroom's word cards were of varying sizes.

The interviews took place between January 19 and February 1, 2000. The interviews ranged between four and eleven minutes long. At the conclusion of the interviews, a class rank order of students' reading ability was collected from each participating teacher. This rank order was based on data collected from running records and teacher observation. This data source was used to see if the students that were interviewed would identify more emerging readers and writers as users of the word wall. The interview consisted of the following eight questions:

Table 2
Student Interview Questions

Question	*Answer Type*	*Data Analysis*
What do you call this? (Interviewer points to the word wall.)	Yes/No	percentage of known
Pretend that a new student is coming to your class tomorrow. Your job is to teach them about your classroom. Show me how you would explain the word wall to the new student.	Verbal explanation.	Classify and analyze the responses
Do you use the word wall?	Yes/No	percentage of Y/N

Question	*Answer Type*	*Data Analysis*
If yes: When? and Why? If not why not?	Verbal explanation.	Classify and analyze the responses
Please name some people that you have seen using the word wall in your classroom.	Verbal list.	Do the identified students come from a particular spot in the rank order?
When do you think they use the word wall? Prompt Why?	Verbal explanation.	Classify and analyze the responses
Do you think that the second grade teachers at (blank elementary) should have a word wall in their classroom?	Yes/No	percentage of Y/N
Why or why not?	Verbal explanation.	Classify and analyze the responses

Following the student interviews each question was individually analyzed. For each question that had a yes/no answer a whole group and individual class percentage was figured.

All of the questions requiring a verbal explanation were classified and analyzed using the following method. First, all interview answers were typed below the questions. Each class was typed in a different font. Analyzing one question at a time, I read through all of the answers making notes on the types of answers and possible categories. The notes were scanned for similarities, and category headings were developed and refined. The categories were typed below the question. Then, all interview answers, for that question, were copied and pasted under the category that fit them the best. Each category was reread and changes were made either to the category title or to the placement of answers as needed. In rare instances interview answers were split and put under two categories. Finally, the percentage of both the total group and individual classes were figured for each category. The three different fonts made it easy

to see how many answers from each class were in the individual categories.

Following the initial analysis, further information on students' perceptions of the difference between writing and spelling was gathered from five students in each classroom. The students were asked to clarify what they meant when they said they used the word wall for writing. This collection of data was done in a small group setting where the researcher took limited notes. After the small group discussion the two categories, spelling and writing, were collapsed into one.

On January 18, 2000 each classroom's word wall words were recorded. Word lists were compiled that showed which words were common among the three classrooms. (See Appendix C.)

Data on teacher opinion and use of the word wall were collected through interviews. Each interview took approximately forty minutes. Mrs. Red and Mrs. May were interviewed following the conclusion of the data analysis to allow for clarification of issues that arose during the student interviews. Interview answers for Ms. Eli (the researcher) were done in written format. The teacher interview consisted of the following eleven questions:

- Why do you have a word wall?
- How many months/years have you used a word wall?
- Do you use a word wall differently now than when you first began?
- What types of teacher activities do you do with a word wall?
- How much time do you think you spend per day/per week on word wall activities?
- How has the use of the word wall changed over the course of this school

year?

•How do your students use a word wall?

•Have you noticed a change in how your students utilize the word wall?

•Where do your word wall words come from?

•How/do you use the word wall for editing?

The teachers were asked to recount any significant comments and conversations that they had heard from their students about the word wall. Comments of interest, in the form of anecdotal notes, were recorded and included, as applicable, throughout the findings.

Description of Participants

The school in which I work has a population of 584 students, kindergarten through sixth grade. Sixty-three first grade students aged six and seven were interviewed for this study. Thirty-two percent of these students received free lunch and 7% received reduced lunch. Of the sixty-three students, 28% percent were Native American, 2% were Hispanic and 70% were Caucasian. Three students spoke English as a Second Language, one Polish and two Russian. One deaf child was interviewed, however, her interview was not included in the results section as she did not answer the interview questions.

Data Analysis and Findings

Classroom Descriptions

All three classrooms implemented similar literacy instructional techniques. Each classroom's reading and writing curriculum included some form of whole group

instruction with *Scholastic Literacy Place* (Education Group, 2000), small guided reading groups and at least fifteen minutes a day of draftbook writing. From late September until early January, all three classrooms introduced four or five new word wall words per week.

The following descriptions outline the individual uses and views of the word wall for Ms. Eli, Mrs. Red and Mrs. May.

Ms. Eli's Classroom: Ms. Eli has had a word wall in her classroom for one year and eight months. She originally put up the word wall during the 1998-99 school year because Mrs. May recommended that she include one in her classroom. Ms. Eli believed that it was important for her students to have visual access to the correct spelling of the basic high frequency words and followed Mrs. May's recommendation. During the first year Ms. Eli put the words up on the wall, however, she did not focus much instruction around it. This year, her second year with a word wall in her classroom, her instruction around the word wall was expanded to include a wider variety of games, activities and word work.

Words on the wall in Ms. Eli's classroom were harvested from those used in the students' writing in combination with the suggested word list from *Scholastic Literacy Place* (Education Group, 2000). The words were written with black ink on very large construction paper cards. The cards were pink, white, yellow, orange, green, purple and blue. The approximate size was three inches by five inches. As certain letters became crowded, for example w and h, the alphabet cards on the word wall were moved to make room for the new words.

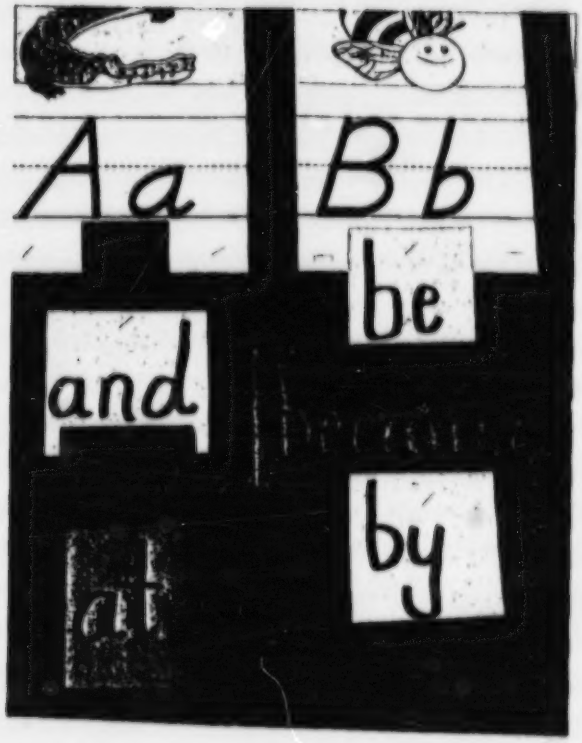


Figure 2. Close up photo of Ms. Ell's Word Wall. January 18, 2000.

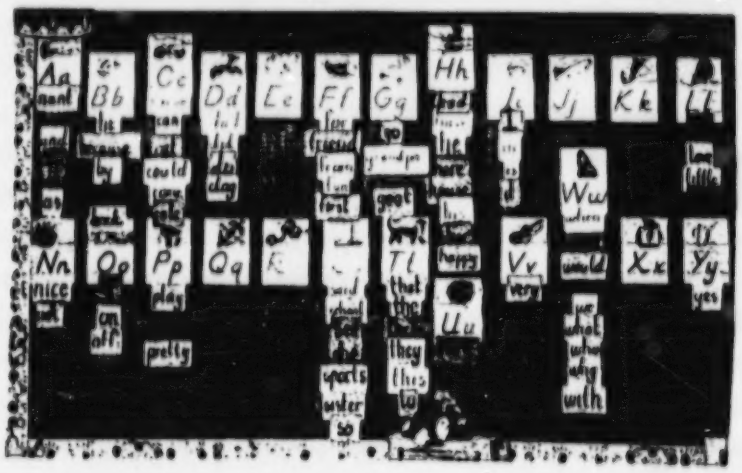


Figure 3. Photo of Ms. Ell's Word Wall. January 18, 2000.

Beginning in late September and continuing through mid April, each Monday new word wall words were introduced through a game called Secret Message, which is similar

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to Hangman. Students recorded the word wall words in a three ring folder which they took to the computer lab each week where they typed the word wall words. They also brought their word wall books to the ABC Center where they built the weekly words out of cubes, magnetic letters, foam letters or stamps. After December, one weekly assignment for all students was to write the new word wall words in sentences. Ten to fifteen minutes of word identification instruction on white boards occurred once or twice a week. This instruction included dividing the white board into four, six or eight sections and writing words in each box that matched a clue given by Ms. Eli. For example: Write a four lettered pink word that starts with the /l/ sound like. Other days all w words might be written on the white board and the students were instructed to circle who, underline why until all the words were marked in some fashion and then clues were given to erase the words. The students became experts at this and began to make up their own clues for words to erase.

Other whole group activities included recognizing word wall words in poems, big books and other texts. These words were marked with colored highlighter tape. Then the words were counted and read in isolation. During subsequent readings of the poems or big books the students were to clap, tap or pat when saying the highlighted word wall word. Quickly chanting and spelling several words was also a part of the high frequency word instruction. Sentence dictation utilizing word wall words was included in small group reading and writing instruction time. Mini-lessons on how to spell unknown words that are similar to those on the word wall began to occur in March. These mini-lessons were taught during teacher modeled writing.

Ms. Eli noted interesting changes in the way that the word wall was used in her

classroom. In the fall, the word wall was used more as an instructional tool with the main user being the teacher. She emphasized that students will not appropriately and independently use the word wall without extensive modeling of how to use it. The students became more and more aware of the words on the word wall and their alphabetical arrangement as the year progressed. Mrs Eli noticed her students using the word wall on many occasions. For example, on September 20, Nora asked Catie how to spell the word like. Catie responded with, "Well, geeze, just look up there!" On March 8, Lynn, an emerging writer, marched up to the word wall, stood on tiptoe to point underneath the word this, then marched back to her seat and wrote the word this in her draftbook.

Ms. Eli felt that no one in her class became over-reliant on the word wall; in various situations some students used the word wall independently and some did not. As her students gained more phonetic skills and their writing pace and creativity blossomed, Ms. Eli noticed that they relied on the word wall more for editing their own writing before publishing, rather than using it during the actual writing time. Before they could publish a story, all word wall words needed to be spelled accurately. This skill was handled differently by students of varying abilities. Students who were fluent writers could handle this task independently, while emerging writers required more teacher support to identify their misspelled word wall words.

Ms. Eli emphasizes that the word wall is one of many instructional tools in her classroom and it does not stand alone as a method of instruction. Ms. Eli has a favorable opinion of the word wall and will use one again next year.

Mrs. Red's classroom: Mrs. Red has had a word wall in her classroom for eight

months. She originally put up the word wall during the 1999-2000 school year for several reasons, the most important being that she had a deaf student in her classroom who could not hear sounds in words and she wanted this student to have the opportunity to have visual access to a wider range of written words. The adoption of *Scholastic Literacy Place* (Education Group, 2000), which recommends using a word wall, and the fact that the other first grade teachers in the building had word walls were also important factors in helping her decide that she would utilize a word wall in her classroom for the first time. During the fall of 1999 Mrs. Red focused a considerable amount of time to instruction around word wall words, however that dwindled in January.

Words on the wall in Mrs. Red's classroom were taken in sequence from the recommended list in *Scholastic Literacy Place* (Education Group, 2000). From September to mid December she added five new words a week. The words were written with black ink on small manilla colored card stock. The approximate size was one inch by four inches. In January she added the high frequency words friend and play. No additional words were added after January.

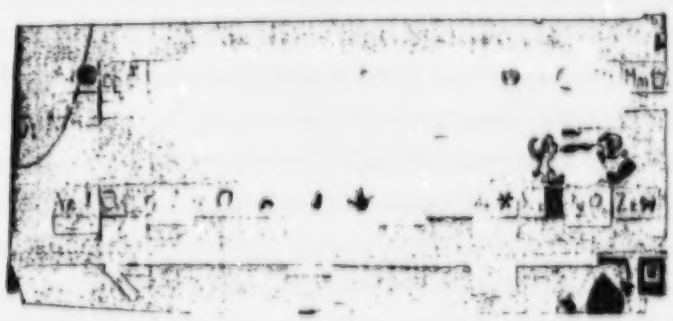

Figure 4. Photo of Ms. Red's Word Wall, January 18, 2000.

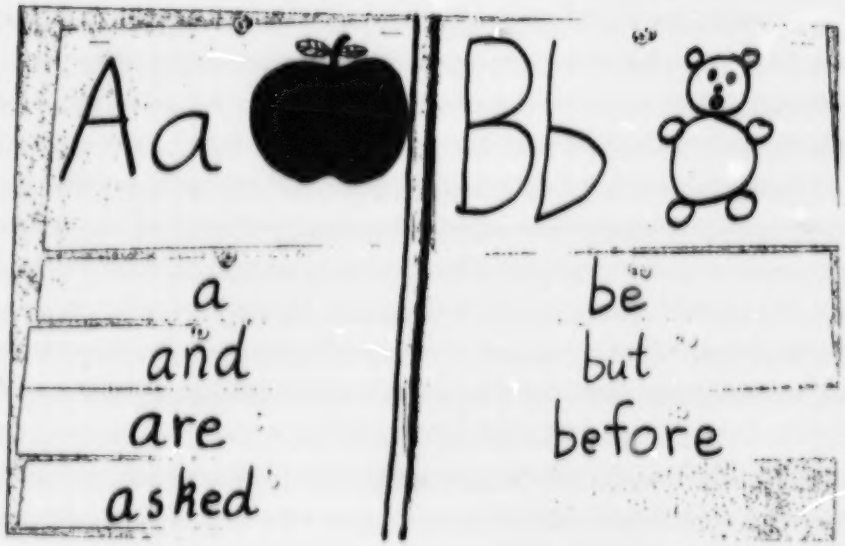

Figure 5. Close up photo of Mrs. Red's Word Wall. January 18, 2000.

Beginning in early September and continuing until December Mrs. Red had thirty minute word work sessions three times a week. Activities included introducing the new word and orally segmenting it. One student said a dictation sentence and the class then wrote the sentence on the white boards. The students tried to find the new words in stories. Mrs. Red, and a fellow reading teacher, believed that this instruction was confusing her struggling readers and stopped adding new words to the wall in December. The word work sessions also stopped at this time. Instead, for the remainder of the year Mrs. Red posted a word wall word on the large white board each morning. The students practiced their penmanship by using this word in a sentence of their own design.

Throughout the year Mrs. Red used the word wall as an editing tool. The ability level of her students determined the amount of support that she gave during these daily writing conferences. More proficient writers occasionally needed a reminder to check the word wall for spelling before moving on to a new story. She showed the more

emergent writers the misspelled words and asked them "Where can you find that word?" then they would edit the words together.

Mrs. Red noticed that her students used the word wall for spelling; however, she had not noted any student conversations regarding the word wall. Additionally, Mrs. Red reported no changes in her students' use of the word wall from September to March.

Mrs. Red emphasized that putting up the word wall was very controversial for her. She believes that expecting correct spelling inhibits first graders as writers. This year she observed that her students were greatly inhibited as writers and did not write as much as in previous years. She attributed this to the fact that they worried more about spelling than in the past. Mrs. Red stated that this concern for correct spelling and the reluctance of her students to produce long stories and write for longer periods of time might have been due to the presence of the word wall. Although Mrs. Red has a mixed opinion of the word wall, she is considering putting one up again next year.

Mrs. May's classroom: Mrs. May has had a word wall in her classroom for four years and eight months. In earlier years, she displayed a complete word wall in September that contained all of the basic high frequency words and has since changed to putting up a blank word wall in September which she builds together with her students. Mrs. May has a word wall in her classroom to help children develop a spelling vocabulary and writing vocabulary and to provide a visible resource in the classroom.

During the first two weeks of school Mrs. May began adding words to the word wall. She started by putting up students' names on the word wall, generally two or three names a day. After all of the names were up, Mrs. May added five new words a week until mid-April. The words posted on her word wall were a combination of basic sight

words, such as mom, dad, and love, and words from *Scholastic Literacy Place* (Education Group, 2000). The words were written with black ink on pink, yellow and green tag board sentence strips. The approximate size was two and a half inches by four inches. As certain letters became crowded, for example w and h, the word cards were placed in two vertical columns underneath the corresponding letter.

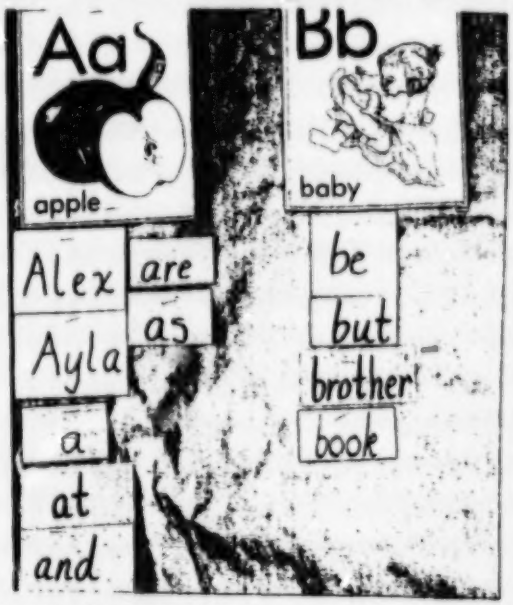

Figure 6. Close up photo of Mrs. May 's Word Wall. January 18, 2000.

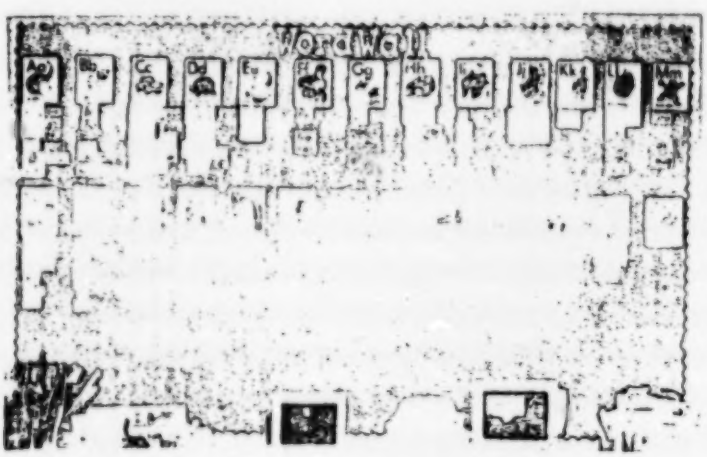

Figure 7. Photo of Mrs. May's Word Wall. January 18, 2000.

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Beginning in the fall Mrs. May directed her students to find and circle the word wall words in the daily news (a large laminated piece of paper where students recorded events in their lives and shared them with the class) three times a week. Students recorded the word wall words in a three ring folder which they took to the computer lab each week where they typed the word wall words. Weekly dictation on small white boards took place with the whole group. Many of the activities that Mrs. May gave her students were presented at centers. Occasionally she placed written copies of the daily news at a center and had the children circle the words as a center activity. Children played word wall bingo at the ABC center. Mrs. May had the word wall words mounted to magnets and she would write cloze sentences in which students needed to put the appropriate word wall word.

Mrs. May noticed significant changes in her students' use of the word wall. In the fall they were focused on using it for the spelling of each other's names; as the year progressed and they became more aware of alphabetical order, they began to utilize the word wall to check on the accuracy of word wall words when editing published stories. Mrs. May believes that as students became more conscious of the word wall they used it more as a spelling resource. She emphasized that in the fall they were not always aware that the word wall was there and consequently did not utilize it on a regular basis for spelling words in their draftbook. Another interesting change in Mrs. May's classroom was that as the year progressed her children began to leave her notes and lists of word wall words that should be included on the word wall.

Mrs. May observed her children using the word wall on a regular basis, mostly for spelling or to check on words when editing published stories. On March 16, Dan wrote

the word many for the word went in the sentence: We went to the park. Mrs. May checked with Dan and asked him what went started with. He replied w. Then, he asked "Is went on the word wall?" She replied, "Why don't you check." He looked up, found went and fixed his sentence so that it made more sense. In other situations Mrs. May observed her students independently using the word wall. Ed was stuck when attempting to write the word with in his draftbook and repetitively said the word with. Finally, he looked up on the word wall, found with and wrote the word.

Mrs. May stressed that word walls can be a used in multiple ways and can be beneficial to students at all ability levels. Mrs. May has a favorable opinion of the word wall and will put one up again next year.

Student Interviews

After the interviews were conducted the data was classified and analyzed. The findings for each of the questions are presented in the following tables and narrative.

Question one: What do you call this? The students were asked to verbally identify the name of the word wall. The interviewer pointed to the word wall replica and asked the students the following question: What do you call this?

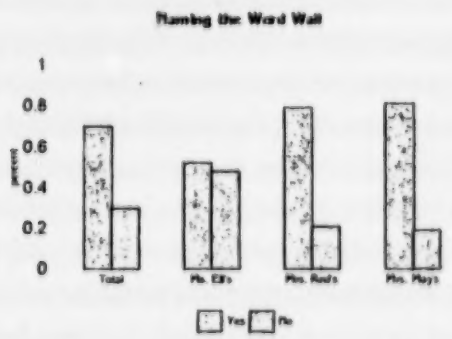

Figure 8. Naming the Word Wall

70% of all first graders interviewed named the word wall correctly and 30% did not. In Mrs. Red's class, 79% of the class called it a word wall and in Mrs. May's class 81% named it accurately. In Ms. Eli's 52% of the students identified the correct name. This dramatic difference could be attributed to several factors. At the beginning of the first interview day both Mrs. Red and Mrs. May casually informed their students that they would be going into the hallway to talk about word walls. Ms. Eli did not inform her students what they would be interviewed about. Additionally, the unfamiliarity of the second interviewer, or the style of the second interviewer, might account for the high percentage of interviewees in Ms. Eli's class that did not correctly identify the name of the word wall.

Of the nineteen incorrect responses the most common name used fit under the heading of "the alphabet" with thirteen responses in this category. Miscellaneous labels included: a) a carnival thing, b) a paper, and c) a chart. All of the "I don't know" responses came from Ms. Eli's class.

Question Two: Pretend that a new student is coming to your classroom. Your job is to teach them about your classroom. Show me how you would explain the word wall to the new student. The students were asked the question. As the interviewer asked the question she pointed directly at the word wall.

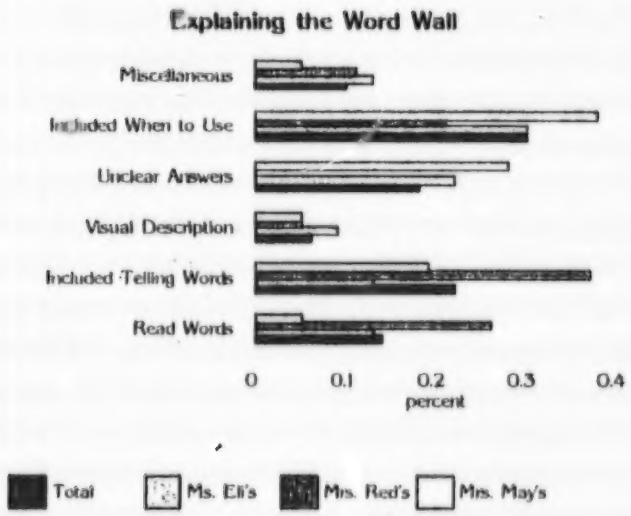

Figure 9. Explaining the Word Wall

When analyzing the interview answers to this question six separate categories emerged from the student responses. The students' explanations included the following information:

Table 3

Explaining the Word Wall

Category	% of Total	Sample Answers	Related Comments
Included when to use the word wall	30%	"Umm...these are all words that if you don't know how to spell them you can just look up here."	Most student answers included the words look up, look or look at. The new student was told to look up to get words that they needed to spell or write.
Included telling the word wall words	22%	"You tell them (the new student) what those words are if they don't know them."	Many students in Mrs. May's class mentioned telling the student the words and the names on the wall.

Gave unclear answers.	18%	"I don't know."	This demonstrated that they were unclear of how to use the word wall or were unable to articulate how to use the word wall. Zero percent of Mrs. Red's class gave unclear answers.
Read the words	14%	"That's the letter a that's a, and, are, asked...that's b...be, but, before, that's C...came, that's d...do, did, down, that's F...for...I'll skip that one..." this is the letter g....(continued through all of the letters telling letter and words saying "I'll skip that one" at each unknown word."	When prompted with what else or how would you explain the word wall the students continued to read the words.
Miscellaneous	10%	*(Gets up and walks to the wall)* "This is the word wall. We keep words up here and our teacher puts new words up here almost everyday and sometimes we write them on the white board." "...um...that there is a lot of words on there and the words we've done already and we can read them."	These answers did not clearly fit into any of the existing categories so a miscellaneous category was created.
Gave a visual description of the word wall	6%	"That's a word wall, it has words on it. It has letters on it." "Ummm, you put all the words in alphabetical order".	These responses generally referred to the amount of words or how they were placed on the word wall.

It is interesting to note that in Ms. Eli's and Mrs. May's class over a third of the students explained to the new student when to use the word wall whereas, only 20% of Mrs. Red's student responses fit into this category. Instead, a large group of answers, 37% of Mrs. Red's class fell into the category of telling the new students the words. This difference could be attributed to the fact that the students in Ms. Eli's and Mrs. May's class perceived that it was important to know to use the word wall during writing times and the students in Mrs. Red's class perceived that it was important to know the words so that the new student could effectively participate in whiteboard work and complete their word wall penmanship activity in the morning. Ms. Eli's and Mrs. May's

class comprised all of the unclear answers for how to use the word wall. It was interesting to note was that none of Mrs. Red's class gave unclear answers on how to use the word wall. This might be the result of the clarity of their morning penmanship assignments.

Question Three: Do You Use the Word Wall? The interviewees were asked if they used the word wall. Students responded yes, no or sometimes.

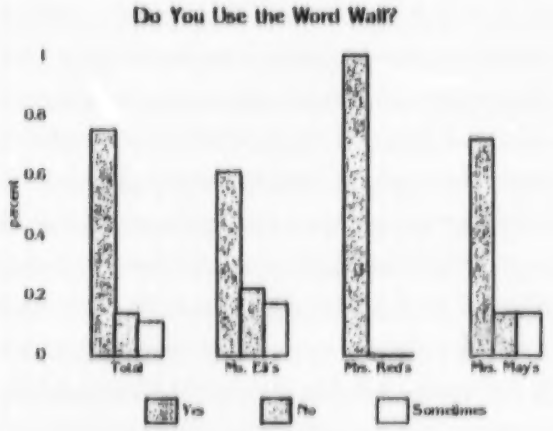

Figure 10. Do You Use the Word Wall?

75% of first graders interviewed said that they used the word wall and 11% used it sometimes. All students in Mrs. Red's classroom stated that they used the word wall. This could be attributed to the way that Mrs. Red structured her morning seatwork activity around the word wall words. In Ms. Eli's class 61% of students used the word wall and 17% said that they used the word wall sometimes. 22% stated that they did not use the word wall. In Mrs. May's class 72% said that they used the word wall. 14% used it sometimes and 14% did not use the word wall at all.

Following their answer they were asked to support their yes or sometimes

response with when they used the word wall.

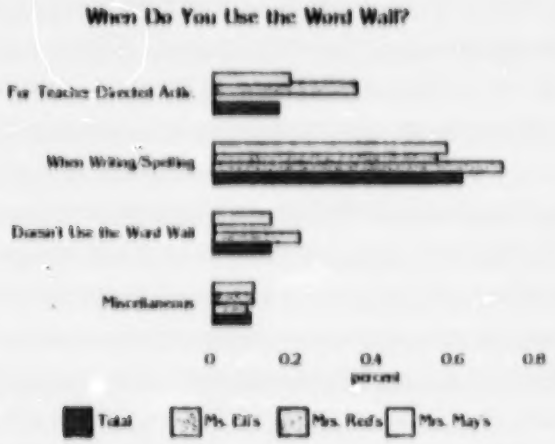

Figure II. When Do You Use the Word Wall?

When analyzing the student answers to when they used the word wall three categories, plus the I don't use the word wall answers, emerged. The students' explanations included the following information:

Table 4

Categories for When Students Use the Word Wall

Category	% of Total	Sample Answer	Related Comment
When writing and spelling words	61%	'When I need to spell a word like grandma or grandpa.'	Some students mentioned specific words and others just said for spelling or writing.
For Teacher Directed Activities	16%	'When I am writing my morning penmanship and stuff like that and I find the word I do not know.' 'When I am doing circling word wall words. I just look at them and I circle it...'	In Mrs. Red's class 37% of the class stated that they used the word wall during penmanship and morning work.19% of Mrs. May's class stated that they used the word wall during carpet time when circling words or using whiteboards. In Ms. Eli's class no responses fit into this category.

Miscellaneous	9%	These ranged from using the word wall to fix words to edit stories to using it during attendance times.	Each classroom had a similar percentage of responses represented in this section.
Doesn't Use the Word Wall	14%		

Originally, when analyzing the data, spelling and writing were two separate categories. Many children clearly responded that they used the word wall for spelling and mentioned specific words that were difficult for them. Another group of children were more general, and responded that they used the word wall for writing. To clarify what the children meant by "writing," I met with this general response group of children. I found that when students said that they used the word wall for writing, they meant they used the word wall for spelling words. Therefore, I collapsed the two categories into one. In helping to clarify the difference between writing and spelling, a student in Mrs. May's classroom stated that he used the word wall "...at writing time mostly, because they usually need/want to know the word and that's really the only time we spell."

12% of the total interviewees said that they did not use the word wall. All of the students that stated they did not use the word wall were from Ms. Ell's and Mrs. Red's classrooms. Following their answer they were asked why they did not use the word wall. The two most emerging learners of this group did not state a clear reason for not using the word wall. A representative comment from one of six students who did not use the word wall was, "I'm a good speller-I can memorize the words from the word wall." Of the 6 students who said they did not use the word wall, all but one, is at or above the grade level standard in reading and writing.

After the students explained when they used the word wall, they were asked to support their yes or sometimes response with a reason for why they used the word wall.

These responses were not categorized and analyzed using percentages. However the overwhelming majority of students said they used it for spelling. Other major reasons for using the word wall included: a) they liked the word wall, b) they used it to learn, and c) their teacher said to use it.

Question Four: Please name some people that you have seen using the word wall in your classroom? When do you think they use the word wall? When asking this question the researcher was attempting to see if the interviewees would be able to identify classmates of any particular academic standing as users of the word wall. Using the class rank orders, the differences among academic levels and use of word walls was explored. Results from this section were inconclusive. Many children identified peers that they play with as users of the word wall. However, first grade peer groups are much more flexible than in the upper grades and there appeared to be no correlation between names given as users of the word wall and friendship levels or between the names given and student academic standing.

Even though the data about who uses the word wall was inconclusive, the analysis shows that the majority of students believe that their peers use the word wall when writing and spelling.

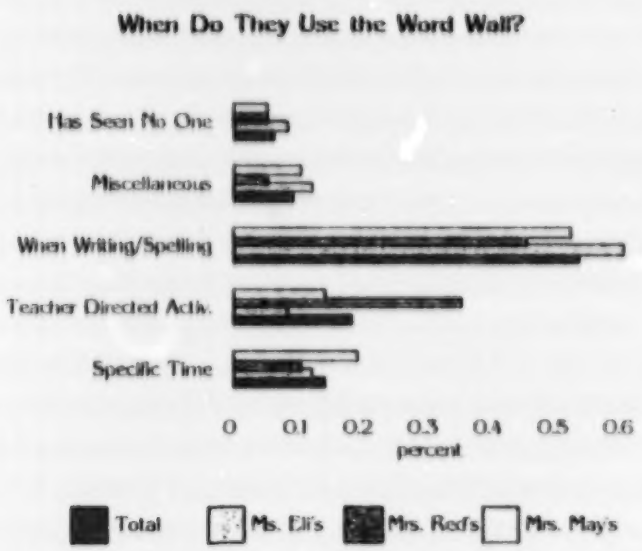

Figure 12. When Do Your Peers Use the Word Wall?

Over 50% of all students believed that their peers used the word wall for spelling and writing words. In addition to this category, four additional categories appeared. Table 5 shows categories for when students think their peers use the word wall.

Table 5

Categories for Peers Usage of the Word Wall

Category	% of Total	Sample Answer	Related Comments
When Spelling/Writing	53%	"When they don't know a letter or words, because if they forgot the word... then they just copy it."	Mrs. Red's class was somewhat lower than the total percentage with only 45% of her class fitting into this category. Ms. Eli's class was somewhat higher that the total with 60% fitting into this category.
Teacher Directed Activities	18%	"In the morning when we write sentences." "When we draw on those boards with the colored pens..so she (Ann) can know the words she needs to know."	35% of Mrs. Red's class stated that they used the word wall during penmanship in the morning or during whiteboard word work time.

Specific Time in the School Week	14%	'He used it today...I saw him use it.'	Student answers in this category suggested that their peers used the word wall on a specific school day, everyday, all the time, or even as one student in classroom two said, *'Tuesday and sometimes Wednesdays.'*
Miscellaneous	9%	'Whenever they need to fix a word.' '...just to learn to read I think.'	These answers ranged form using the word wall at times such as recess for playing school, for editing or for no clear reason at all.
Has Seen No One Use It	6%	'I haven't seen anyone use it.'	Of these students only one stated that they also did not use the word wall.

The most dramatic differences in cross class comparisons was that only 8% of Ms. Eli's class stated that they used the word wall for teacher directed activities and 35% of Mrs. Red's class used it for teacher directed activities. Looking back at an earlier question: When do you use the word wall, 61% of students stated that they used the word wall for spelling and writing words. The results were similar for their peers. 53% of the students believed that their peers used the word wall for spelling words. However, with the exception of teacher directed activities, the other categories varied slightly from self use to peer use. It is interesting to note that 35% of Mrs. Red's students mentioned that they used the word wall for teacher directed activities and 35% of the students perceived that their peers used the word wall for teacher directed activities.

Question Five: Do you think that the second grade teachers at (blank elementary) should have a word wall in their classroom? Why or why not? The students were asked to make a recommendation to the second grade teachers at their school. The interviewer asked the students the following question: Do you think that the second grade teachers at (blank elementary) should have a word wall in their classroom?

Figure 13. Word Walls in Second Grade?

63% of all students interviewed felt that the second grade teachers should have a word wall in their classroom. Over 60% of Mrs. Red's and Ms. Eli's class recommended a second grade word wall. Mrs. May's class had a dramatic increase, with 95% of the interviewees positively suggesting a word wall for second grade. This striking difference might be attributed to the fact that Mrs. May will move with her students to second grade next year. Mrs. May had not yet announced this fact at the time of the interviews, however casual references to what the class will do next year had been made. Her students, who might have been aware of this fact, possibly did not want to say that they did not feel a word wall was necessary in second grade.

Following the yes/no suggestion, students were asked to give a supporting reason. These answers were then analyzed and classified into categories. The yes answers fit into the following eight categories:

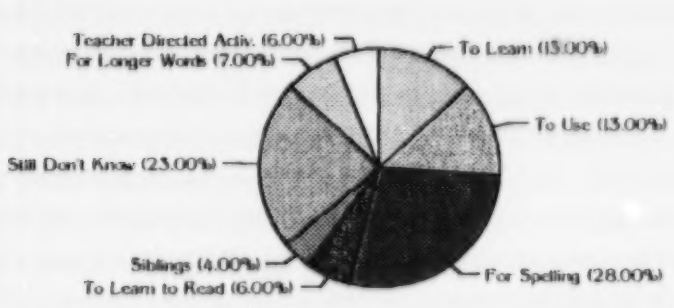

Figure 14. Why Word Walls in Second Grade?

When analyzing the student answers to why second grade teachers should utilize a word wall eight categories emerged. The students' explanations included the following information:

Table 6

Categories for Why Second Grade Teachers Should Have a Word Wall

Category	% of Total	Sample Answer	Related Comments
For Spelling	28%	'So they can spell words right.'	In this section no mention was made of using the word wall for writing.
Second Graders Still Don't Know	23%	'Because maybe some of them (2nd graders) don't know how to spell some words.'	They students were adamant in their suggestion that second graders still don't know words and that a word wall could be used to help second graders know them.
To Use	13%	'It is kinda neat and because we can use a lot of words there.'	This referred to having a word wall in second grade so that the second graders can look at it and use it.
To Learn	13%	'Cause they learn about the alphabet and words.'	No specific mention was made of either reading or writing, just learning in general.
For Longer Words	7%	'Yes...but with bigger words, very big words, just very, very big words.'	These responses referred to second graders needing access to tricky and bigger words.

Teacher Directed Activities	6%	"So they can copy it with their white boards."	They stated that second grade teachers should have a word wall so that they activities such as circling word wall words and typing the word wall words in the computer lab could be continued in second grade.
To Learn to Read	6%	"Because it could help them to read better."	The interviewees stated that word walls could help the second graders read.
Related to Siblings	4%	"My sister, she's in third grade, sometimes she does words wrong and some second graders might spell wrong and they might need to look at the word wall."	These students recommended a second grade word wall because they have older siblings that still have spelling difficulty.

The data collected on why second grade teachers should have a word wall in their classroom was not analyzed and compared between the three teachers due to the unbalanced number of students between classes. Ms. Eli had 14 yes responses, Mrs. Red had 13 and Mrs. May had 20. The percentage comparisons among the three classes were difficult to make.

23% of all students interviewed felt that the second grade teachers did not need to have a word wall in their classroom. Ms. Eli's and Mrs. Red's classes had similar results with 39% and 37% saying no respectively. Only 5% of Mrs. May's students did not recommend a word wall to the second grade teachers.

Students who felt that their second grade teachers should not utilize a word wall were asked to give a supporting statement.

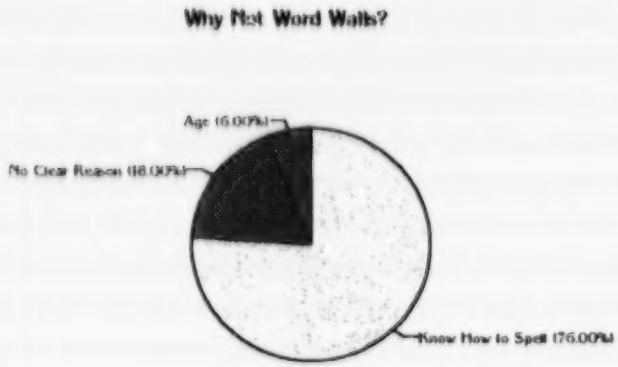

Figure 15. Why Not Word Walls in Second Grade?

These answers were then analyzed and classified into categories. The no answers fit into the following three categories:

Table 7

Categories For Why Second Grade Teachers Should Not Have A Word Wall

Category	% of Total	Sample Answer	Related Comment
They Know How To Spell	76%	"...by then you know how to spell."	Students stated that in second grade they would know all of the words.
No Clear Reason	18%	"I don't know, I guess they don't need to spell words."	These students gave no clear reason for why second grade teachers should not have a word wall.
Age	6%	"Cause second grades are very old."	These no responses were due to the fact that second graders are very old and do not need a word wall.

The data collected on why second grade teachers should not have a word wall in their classroom was not analyzed and compared between the three teachers due to the unbalanced number of students between classes. Ms. Eli had 9 no responses, Mrs. Red had 7 and Mrs. May had 1. The percentage comparisons among the three classes

were difficult to make.

Findings on First Grade Word Wall Words

All three classrooms had a variety of words on their word walls. The number of words ranged from fifty-nine in Ms. Eli's class and Mrs. Red's class to ninety-two (sixty-nine excluding the names) in Mrs. May's classroom. Analysis on the choice of word wall words showed that many of the word wall words were selected from the top 30 high frequency words used in writing which was established by Sitton (1997). All three teachers had thirty-three words in common as of January 18, 2000. Many other words were found in two of the three classrooms, see Appendix C for a detailed list of words that all three classes had in common. Word wall word selection remained rather consistent among all three classrooms. This might largely be due to the fact that the words first grade teachers emphasize in spelling and reading instruction are the most frequently used. These high frequency words do not change with whatever "program" has been implemented for reading and writing instruction.

Methods for Verification

Methods for verification of data included using several outside educational professionals to read and discuss the interview analysis. Verification of data was achieved through the participation of a university professor as an interviewer for Ms. Eli's classroom to decrease bias on the part of the researcher. Expanding the interviewee poll to three first grade classrooms with three different teachers provided additional verification.

Conclusion: Discussion and Implications

Various proponents of word walls have written teacher guidebooks that contain information on how to utilize word walls in the classroom (see Table I). However, much of the actual research studies surrounding word walls emphasizes using word walls to teach reading and spelling through analogies. This study has shown that without direct and systematic instruction, word walls will not be used by first graders as a tool for reading with analogies. In fact, 61% of first graders interviewed for this study expressed the opinion that word walls are mostly a writing tool. Although word walls are used to teach and review high frequency words the student participants in this study emphasized the importance of the word wall as a resource for accurately spelling or editing words.

It is significant to note that none of the teachers in this study closely resembled the researcher (see Table I) who emphasized using analogies for teaching reading and writing. Mrs. Red paralleled her instruction with Cunningham (1995) in that she placed a heavy emphasis on daily word work. Mrs. Red and Ms. Eli resembled Pinnell & Fountas (1998) with their emphasis on using a word wall for interactive word work and as a support for writing. It is not surprising to conclude that the children in this study did not use the word wall for analogies as they were not given thorough and specific instruction in this area. Had the instructional settings and methods of the teachers in this study been different, it is possible that different interview responses would have been given.

This study has shown that most first graders know what a word wall is and they know how and when to use the word wall. Many of the first graders in this study used the word wall for different reasons including for teacher directed activities such as

penmanship, and for writing and spelling words.

The results of this study appear to show that the instructional emphasis of a teacher will influence how and when the children use the word wall in the classroom. Directly structuring student assignments and lessons around the word wall will result in greater numbers of students who use the word wall on a daily basis. However, more structured teacher activities will not necessarily result in independent student use of the word wall. Modeling and clearly demonstrating how to use the word wall may help students to access the word wall during writing time but will not result in the use of the word wall by all students.

One implication for this study is that word walls are beneficial for students as a literacy tool. Using word wall word activities can help increase students word knowledge and awareness of words. However, it is critical to keep in mind that the word wall is only one tool, and that whole class lessons must be fast paced and well designed to engage students at a variety of academic levels.

Many teachers utilize word walls in their classrooms. Little research has been done which looks closely at the effectiveness of words walls in the classroom. If publishers are going to recommend the implementation of a word wall within specific reading programs, they should also clearly recommend how and why to use the word wall with explicit directions. This study has shown that differences in teacher use of word walls results in changed student perceptions of word walls. If curricula, such as *Scholastic Literacy Place* (Education Group, 2000) have specific reasons for including word wall in their programs, these reasons need to be explicitly stated so that teachers clearly understand the purpose for including a word wall in their classroom.

A closer look at how to use the word wall as an effective editing tool could be an avenue to explore through future research. Another study could analyze children of different ability levels and how they use word walls in reading and writing. It would be fascinating to continue this study and take a closer look at the students over a full school year. Using class rank orders, the researcher could then explore the differences in word wall use among students at different academic levels.

Teachers and students alike have a wide variety of perceptions about word walls. The results of this study have shown that 75% of all students recommend a word wall for second grade teachers. This implies that first graders believe that word walls are helpful to them in the classroom. With careful planning and strategic instruction word walls can be effectively implemented into a balanced literacy curriculum.

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Appendices

Name_____ M F
Class: Walton Date &Time_____
Rank order_____

What do you call this? Y/N

Pretend that a new students is coming to your class tomorrow. Your job is to teach them about your classroom. Show me how you would explain the word wall to the new student?

Do you use the word wall? Y/N
If yes: When? Why? If not, why not?

Please name some people that you have seen using the word wall in your classroom?

When do you think they use the word wall? Why?

Do you think that the second grade teachers at Eagleridge should have a word wall in their classroom? Y/N

Why or why not?

January 4, 1999

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am currently in the process of completing my Master's in Education from Western Washington University. I have chosen to study how first grade children use word walls. I would like to spend about five minutes with your child discussing the word wall in their classroom. I will share the results of this research with both Mrs. Dralle and Mrs. Wahlgren.

Parent permission is required as a part of this project. Please mark one of the boxes below, sign the bottom of this paper and return it to school with your child as soon as possible. Please call me if you have any questions or concerns regarding this project. I am more than willing to sit down and discuss them with you.

Sincerely,

Becca Walton
First Grade Teacher, Room 219
Eagleridge Elementary
383-9716

☐ Yes, my child may participate in the project.

☐ No, please do not include my child in the project.

_____
Please Print Your Child's Name

_____
Parent Signature

Words All Three Classrooms Had on the Word Wall
January 18, 2000

a	and	are	be	did	do	for	from	go
he	have	I	it	is	in	like	my	on
of	said	see	she	the	they	that	this	to
was	we	what	with	why	you			

Words Two of the Three Classrooms Had on the Word Wall
January 18, 2000

✲ at	❀ but	✲ brother	❀ before	✲ can	✲ cat	✲ dog	✲ dad	✲ friend
❀ first	✲ grandma	✲ grandpa	❀ her	☆ here	✲ love	✲ mom	❀ me	❀ no
✲ not	❀ now	❀ out	❀ off	✲ play	❀ put	✲ sister	☆ there	❀ up
☆ who								

☆Classroom 1 and 2
✲Classroom 1 and 3
❀Classroom 2 and 3

Words Only Classroom One Had
January 18, 2000

because	by	fun	house	nice	school	sports	very	yes

Words Only Classroom Two Had
January 18, 2000

asked	came	down	has	into	looks	let's	little	over
soon	through	went						

Words Only Classroom Three Had
January 18, 2000

as	book	get	how	his	had	look	or	our
them	will							

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